

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **Breaking the Stigma and Promoting Mental Health for Birthing Persons**

### ***1 in 8 Birthing Persons Experience Symptoms of Postpartum Depression***

**HOUSTON** – May is Maternal Mental Health Awareness Month, a time to raise awareness about the importance of mental health for expecting and new birthing persons, and Harris County Public Health (HCPH) wants to shed light on this public health concern.

Pregnancy and childbirth are important life events that can bring about intense emotions and changes. However, many people experience sadness, anxiety, depression, and can often feel overwhelmed after giving birth, which can have a significant impact on mental health.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), about 1 in 8 individuals who recently gave birth experience symptoms of postpartum depression (also called PPD). According to the Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System (PRAMS), in Texas between 2016 and 2020, about 15.5 percent of birthing persons reported feeling depressed in the three months before pregnancy, 15.2 percent reported feeling depressed during pregnancy, and 13.4 percent reported feeling symptoms of PPD.

PPD often is confused with the “baby blues,” a term used to describe the worry, sadness, and tiredness many people experience in the days and weeks after giving birth. Baby blues symptoms typically resolve on their own within two weeks, while PPD is more intense, lasts longer than two weeks, and often requires treatment.

Not everyone experiences depression the same way. The frequency, duration, and intensity of emotional changes differ from person to person. Symptoms of depression can include:

- Feeling sad, anxious, hopeless, pessimistic, guilty, worthless, helpless, irritable, or “empty”
- Loss of interest in hobbies and activities
- Loss of energy
- Problems concentrating, recalling details, and making decisions
- Difficulty sleeping or sleeping too much
- Overeating or loss of appetite
- Thoughts of suicide or suicide attempts
- Aches or pains that do not get better with treatment

While the symptoms of PPD share similarities with those of depression, they may also include:

- Crying more often than usual
- Feeling angry

*HCPH is the local public health agency for the Harris County, Texas jurisdiction. It provides a wide variety of public health activities and services aimed at improving the health and well-being of the Harris County community.*

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- Withdrawing from your loved ones
- Feeling numb or disconnected from your baby or worrying that you will hurt your baby
- Feeling guilty about not being a good parent or doubting your ability to care for your baby

PPD does not discriminate! It can happen to anyone after giving birth, even those who previously had a healthy pregnancy and birth. Although there is no known cause for PPD, there are experiences that may put some birthing persons at higher risk. The March of Dimes states that factors for PPD include:

- Previous history of depression or mental health conditions, family history of depression or mental health conditions, and depression during pregnancy
- If you have been physically or sexually abused or have problems with your partner, including domestic violence
- Stressful life events such as the death of a partner or loved one, being unemployed or having low income, little education, or having little or no support from family or friends
- Unplanned or unwanted pregnancy
- Being diabetic before or during pregnancy
- Preterm (before 37 weeks) labor and delivery
- Being pregnant with multiples
- Pregnancy and birth complications and pregnancy loss
- Smoking, drinking, or using harmful drugs
- Having trouble breastfeeding or caring for your baby
- If the baby is sick or has health conditions
- Having negative thoughts and having trouble adjusting to being a parent

To provide better care for birthing persons and their children, HCPH established the [Maternal and Child Health Program](#) (MCHP). The goal of this program is to reduce risks and empower families to create a foundation for a healthy family. One of the services offered through MCHP is to improve the well-being of participants through a holistic care-coordinated approach. Participants suffering from PPD would have access to counseling and mental health services through coordination.

PPD is treatable and most people get better with treatment. If you think you may suffer from PPD, talk to your healthcare provider for a possible referral to a mental healthcare professional or visit the [CDC's Resources](#) for help in your area.

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